

Bill Reauthorizes Critical Resources for Fire Departments

WASHINGTON - The House today voted to pass ***the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2009***, introduced by U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell to reauthorize and fund programs that provide crucial resources to fire departments in Arizona and across the country. H.R. 3791 passed the House by a bipartisan vote of 395 to 31. The bill now moves to the Senate for consideration.

The bill reauthorizes grants that are made available to local fire departments to purchase response equipment, training, and firetrucks.

"This is a necessary step at a time when fire departments in many areas of the country are confronted with the prospect of laying-off firefighters," Mitchell said. "While we can never thank our firefighters enough, we can make sure they have the tools and resources needed to keep us safe."

The Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2009, H.R. 3791, was introduced by Mitchell on October 13, 2009, and is composed of the Assistance to Firefighters Grants program (AFG) and the Staffing for Adequate Safety and Emergency Response program (SAFER).

"This bill would fund the grants that help us keep people safe," said Tim Hill, President of the Professional Firefighters of Arizona. "From funding for new equipment and trucks to recruitment

and hiring of more firefighters to fire prevention and safety programs, this bill reaches every aspect of the job we do as firefighters. We are grateful of the work Congressman Mitchell has done on our behalf and thank him for his strong and continued support of firefighters."

From 2005 to 2008 Arizona has received 165 grants for total of \$22.5 million through the AFG program, as well as 24 grants for total of \$3 million from 2005 to 2009 through the Fire Prevention and Safety Program, which will now be incorporated through the AFG program. Arizona has also received 26 grants for total of \$16.2 million through the SAFER program from 2005 to 2009.

The AFG program was created by Congress in 2000 because of concerns that local budgets were unable to handle the mounting responsibilities being assigned to the fire service. It provides funds to local fire departments to purchase equipment, vehicles, and training. Congress created the SAFER program in 2004 to help fire departments hire firefighting personnel and meet voluntary national consensus standards on safe minimum staffing levels. Both AFG and SAFER programs are administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The bill has a broad, bipartisan group of 103 cosponsors and has also been endorsed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Fire Fighters, National Volunteer Fire Council, National Fire Protection Association, and Congressional Fire Services Institute.

The bill includes the following provisions for AFG:

- It provides an authorization of \$1 billion per fiscal year from FY2010 to FY2014.
- It apportions the total AFG funding as follows: Sets aside 25 percent for career fire departments, 25 percent for combination departments, and 25 percent for volunteer fire departments. It further provides that 10 percent of the funds shall be used for Fire Prevention and Safety Grants, 2 percent shall be used for volunteer, non-fire service EMS and rescue organizations, 3 percent may be used for state fire training academies, and the remaining 10 percent shall be left for open competition to all types of fire departments for the traditional AFG grants.

- It reduces the matching requirements for applicants from jurisdictions of a population of 20,000 or more to 10 percent.
- It increases the maximum allowable grant size for AFG, such that:
 - A population of 100,000 or less may receive up to \$1 million;
 - A population of 100,000 to 500,000 may receive up to \$2 million;
 - A population of 500,000 to 1,000,000 may receive up to \$3 million;
 - A population of 1,000,000 to 2,500,000 may receive up to \$6 million;
 - A population of 2,500,000 or more may receive up to \$9 million.
- It adds an economic hardship waiver for departments that are unable to reach the matching requirements or maintenance of budget requirements. Also, sets the maintenance of budget requirement at 80%, or above, the applicant's previous two fiscal year budgets.

The bill sets the following provisions for the SAFER program:

- It provides an authorization of \$1.194 billion per fiscal year from FY2010 to FY2014.
- It sets the grant at three years (with the requirement that the department retain the hire for the entire three-year period of the grant).
- It sets the matching requirements at 20 percent per year of the grant.

- It eliminates an artificial cap on the maximum allowable grant size per firefighter.
- It includes an economic hardship waiver for departments that are unable to meet the matching requirements or maintenance of budget requirements. Provides for waivers for requirements that departments use the fund to supplement, rather supplant, local funds, as well as the requirement that the funds be used to hire additional firefighters rather than retain existing personnel.

[Click here](#) to watch Congressman Mitchell's speech on the floor of the House of Representatives on behalf of the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act.